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History of Lghtham Mote, Kent.

BY

EDWIN HARRIS

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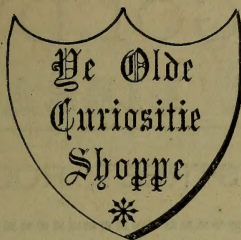
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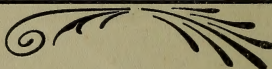
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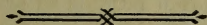
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HISTORY OF IGHTHAM MOTE, KENT.



HIDDEN away in the Nooks and Corners of Kent is many a picturesque old Mansion, and through being situated off the beaten tracks, are not so well known as they deserve to be.

One of these mansions is Ightham Mote, of which former writers say, "The house is quite unique, full of beauty and interest to the architect, painter, and archæologist, whilst its surroundings are a fit setting for such a precious jewel." "The delightful gardens and romantic surroundings of Ightham Mote have often been described. The place is indeed a picture and a poem."

Ightham, otherwise Eightham, lies westward from Wrotham, and obtained the latter name from the eight boroughs, or hams, within its bounds, viz.: *Eightham, Redwell, Ivyhatch, Borough green, St. Clere's, the Moat, Beaulies, and Oldborough.* In the *Textus Roffensis* it is spelt Ehteham. Kelly's Directory of Kent says, "Ightham (the island home, *Anglo Saxon* eyot)." It is chiefly situated in the vale between the chalk, and the sand or quarry hills.

No actual date can be assigned to Ightham Mote, as very little appears to be known of the steps by which the house has reached its present form. The various owners of the property are known, and their possession of the estate extends over many hundred years, from about 1180 to the present day. It is doubtful whether any of them are actually recorded to have built particular parts of the house. There are, however, three well-marked styles in the building, viz.: Decorated, Perpendicular, and late-Tudor.

THE OUTER QUADRANGLE.

The mansion was approached in olden times through an outer quadrangle to the west of the house, measuring about 160 feet from east to west, and 90 feet from north to south. At its westerly end are ancient buildings in half-timbered architecture, highly picturesque in character, now chiefly used as cottages, but once in part as stabling.

Ightham Mote at the present time, after endless rebuildings, additions, and alterations, consists of a completed quadrangle, surrounded by a moat filled by springs from the adjacent rising ground, the water overflowing from it in a southerly direction into a large pond or lake. The moat is about 30 feet wide on the south and west sides of the house, 20 feet on the north, and averages 18 feet on the east.

The external measurements of the house are:—West or gate house front, 108 feet; the eastern, 110 feet; the south or kitchen side, 120 feet; and the north 122 feet.

In trying to trace the dates of the various portions of the mansion we may, with a fair amount of certainty, conclude that the builders followed more or less unconsciously the numerous precedents which are to be found in this and other counties; and that the eastern block, containing the great hall, chapel, kitchens, and a few living and bedrooms, was the only part of the original house; and that side wings and gate house were added as the owner became more opulent.

THE GREAT HALL OR BANQUETING ROOM.

This hall belongs to the Decorated period of architecture, which lasted from about the year 1270 to the year 1380, during the reigns of the first three Edwards and Richard II. The hall is 30 feet long by 20 feet wide, and from floor to ridge of roof 37 feet 6 inches. At the end of the hall, opposite the high table, were twin doors leading the one to the kitchen and the other to the buttery or pantry. One of these has been altered into a cupboard, but the other remains in its original style.

Another opening was made in this wall in 1872, when the outer door was screened off from the hall for the purpose of making the apartment more habitable. The walls vary in thickness from 2 feet 6 inches to 4 feet.

There is a handsome two-light Decorated window on the

south side of the fireplace; it is transomed, and the head filled with delicate tracery. The window is of very little use at the present time, for the ancient courtyard to the east of it, which is about 20 feet square, has been filled up with outhouses used for a dairy and other purposes, has obstructed the light.

In the west wall, however, has been inserted a fine five-light window of the Perpendicular period, which thoroughly lights the hall.

The fireplace is 7 feet in width and exactly in the centre of the east wall, and is of a comparatively late date, and probably superseding a much older one.

The roof is open timbered and constructed with framed spars, those against the gable walls being elaborated into half principals, carried by carved corbels in the angles of the apartment.

The corbel in the south-east corner consists of a grotesque human figure, crushed down by the weight of the roof which rests upon it. One arm helps to bear the weight of the head.

In the south-west angle of the room the corbel represents a man with drapery over his head, carrying the weight on a cushion on his back. His face is rendered grotesque by two of the fingers of each hand pulling his mouth open at the corners.

The north-eastern corbel represents a female figure playing a drum, whilst her shoulders bear the weight.

The corbel in the north-west corner shews a male figure sitting with his hands upon his knees, and shoulders carrying the weight.

The corbel in the west wall: male figure kneeling on right knee, weight on back, right hand on hip, helping to support the weight of arch; head on left hand, elbow on knee.

The stone arch is similarly supported. That in the east wall is a male figure seated, smiling humorously, right hand twisted round to carry weight; book on right knee, hand on left knee.

The pointed doorway, in the northerly end of the east wall, is of the Decorated period. This doorway led to the principal staircase, early chapel, and the family apartments.

The great hall at Ightham Mote has in recent times been handsomely panelled round in oak, and the upper portion decorated with fine old tapestries.

THE EARLY CHAPEL AND CRYPT.

Close to the great hall and fronting the moat is the cellar or crypt, vaulted over with pointed stone arching. Its measurements are 19 feet from east to west and 11 feet 6 inches from north to south, and its walls are about 4 feet thick. The room is lit by a two-light window of Decorated work in its east wall. Over the crypt is, at the present time, a two-storied building.

It is probable that this structure was at one time the Domestic Chapel, which is now converted into two bedrooms by the insertion of a floor and fireplaces.

During alterations in the upper bedroom the removal of the ceiling revealed the fine open-timbered wagon-shaped roof of massive framed spars.

The fireplaces in these bedrooms belong to the Tudor period.

THE ORIEL ROOM.

This room was one of the principal apartments of the house as built in the early Decorated period, and was probably used as the retiring room for the ladies after the meals in the great hall. The floor has nearly the same level as the old chapel adjoining it. It has a massive open timbered roof, and handsome barge boards facing the quadrangle. This apartment in Mediæval houses was often known as the Solar.

THE SECOND OR TUDOR CHAPEL

Is situated in the north wing of the house, its chancel end facing nearly due east. Access to it is gained externally by a flight of steps in the north-west corner of the quadrangle, and from the house itself by doors at its eastern and western ends. The dimensions of the chapel are 38 feet long and 15 feet wide. A very small apartment behind the communion table was possibly used as a confessional.

The chapel is built on a number of pillars, forming at one time a kind of short cloister, open to the quadrangle. The space between these pillars has now been converted into a conservatory. The chapel is lighted by six windows.

The roof is counterceiled with moulded ribs, their form being that of a four-centered Tudor arch. The spaces

between the ribbing being richly ornamented with the portcullis and other Tudor ornamentation. A screen divides the chancel from the rest of the chapel, which contains stalls and a canopied pulpit.

THE GATE HOUSE.

The gate house is in the middle of the western side of the building, opposite to the great hall.

Its outside measurement is 21 feet square, and is three storeys in height. The passage through it into the quadrangle is only 7 feet 6 inches in width.

On the south side of this passage, in the bottom stage of the gate house, is a dungeon, reached by a staircase from above.

On the opposite side of the passage was the porter's lodge, now forming part of the billiard room.

On the northerly side of the entrance gateway is a curious arrangement for holding parley with enemies or persons of doubtful character. It consists of a narrow slit in the outside wall, which twists round at right angles to the south, thus enabling a safe conversation to be held between the porter and a suspect, or a document to be handed in by a person standing on the bridge.

This gate-way was probably built about the end of the fifteenth century, by some it has been assigned to Edward Haut, A.D. 1486, who was well favoured by Henry VII for his father's sacrifices in the Lancastrian cause. The doors are of massive oak, and the framing is in deep relief, with linen roll panels and well studded with nails.

A turret has recently been added to the staircase. Between the windows in the west side of the tower is a stone, on which are carved the arms of the Selby family, who owned the property and lived here for about three hundred years.

THE WITHDRAWING ROOM.

This room is 42 feet long and 17 feet 6 inches wide, and occupies the north-westerly corner of the building on the first floor, close to the gate house and chapel.

The apartment is lit by a large three-light Jacobean window in the north gable, and by a three-light Perpendicular window in the west wall. Various windows have been

blocked up, and there seems some reason for the supposition that this portion of the house was at one time three instead of two storeys in height.

It contains a fine chimney-piece of Jacobean date, which occupies a large part of the southern end of the apartment. A smaller fireplace of recent date is in the north-west corner of the room.

The walls of this room are hung with Chinese paper supposed to be about two hundred years old. Above it is a carved oak frieze, a portion of the ornament being Saracens' heads, the Selby crest. The frieze is decorated in gold and colour.

THE BILLIARD ROOM.

This handsome apartment was for a long time used as a lumber room. It occupies the north-westerly corner of the building under the withdrawing room, and is 40 feet in length and 15 feet 6 inches in width.

In the north-easterly corner of the room are steps leading down into the moat, and used occasionally for bathing purposes.

THE LIBRARY.

The library occupies nearly the whole of the south wing of the building on the ground floor, and in the course of years has undergone many changes.

From the varying thicknesses of the walls and from other indications it is clear that two rooms have been thrown into one. This splendid apartment is full of interesting books and old furniture, and is 37 feet long. At its easterly end the south wall is 3 feet 6 inches in thickness, and it seems likely that the south wing of the house may have terminated where this thick wall ends. The handsome chimney-pieces are both of them interesting.

THE MORNING ROOM.

This room is one of the pleasantest in this rambling old mansion; it has a western aspect, and is situated to the south of the gate house on the ground floor. It is reached from the great hall through the library. It measures 28 feet by 15 feet.

The chimney-piece, fittings, and furniture are all splendid examples of the Jacobean period.

THE BEDROOMS.

The whole of the south wing has been of recent years devoted to nurseries, and here a corridor has been formed next the quadrangle, so that the whole of these rooms now have a cheerful sunny aspect, overlooking the moat to the south.

The bedrooms on the south side of the gate house have a thoroughly old-fashioned appearance. In these rooms there is a considerable amount of the linen-fold oak panelling.

The bachelor bedrooms to the north-east were in a dilapidated condition, but have now been thoroughly restored by the present owner.

THE KITCHENS.

Kitchens in the olden time were very important places, and usually built on a large scale. The kitchen at Ightham is no exception to this rule, for it is large and lofty with wide fireplace in the south-east corner of the building, and is probably the original one, built at the same time as the great hall and early chapel.

The entrance to it is through a small Tudor doorway. This is coupled with a similar doorway, which was probably the buttery hatch.

Passing from the kitchen in a northerly direction we come to an almost endless number of most irregularly shaped pantries and other servants' rooms, occupying nearly the whole length of the house and overlooking the moat.

A portion of this space was at one time an open courtyard.

THE STAIRCASES.

In all quadrangular buildings originally they had no corridors, therefore it is usually found that the staircases are numerous.

The chief of these is at the north-easterly side of the great hall and is of the Jacobean period. It leads up to the oriel room, the early chapel and several bedrooms. Another staircase is between the kitchen and the great hall.

A third, of much greater importance, is of Jacobean workmanship, and is situated in the south-west corner of the building.

A fourth staircase is in the gate house; and a fifth, leading from the courtyard to the Tudor chapel and the withdrawing room.

BUILDING MATERIALS.

A great variety of materials have been used in the course of centuries in building and rebuildings of this house, and whether it is viewed from the outside or from the inside of the quadrangle, it is worthy of particular notice.

Such an examination of the structure leads to the conclusion that nearly the whole of the bottom storey was originally built in stone, and the upper parts in the half-timbered or black and white style. Parts of this black and white work have been plastered over; others have been rebuilt in stone or brick, and in other cases the old half-timbered work has been replaced by new.

These changes, which have occurred at various times, have added a charm and picturesqueness which were originally wanting

In these old mansions we are struck by the pretty effects produced in light and shade by the corbelling-out of each storey one above the other, and are apt to attribute this feature to the superior artistic taste of Mediæval architects; but the reason why the plan came to be so generally adopted, was the necessity of preserving the walls, which were constructed of materials so easily injured, from the disintegrating effects of rain and frost

In the choice of materials a determining reason was the vicinity on the one hand of forests of oak, or on the other of good building stone, and the nearness or absence of good roads or of convenient water-ways.

THE QUADRANGLE.

The quadrangle measures across the centre 75 feet from north to south, and 52 feet from east to west.

The appearance of this courtyard is highly picturesque: from the south-west corner we have before us the west elevation of the great hall, the great five-light window, and the low doorway of the Decorated period. The height of this door is 7 feet 2 inches to the top of the arch; the width is 4 feet 8 inches.

To the north of the hall are the highly picturesque gables of the oriel room and adjoining chamber.

From the same position the eye falls upon the southerly elevation of the Tudor chapel, with its colonnade, and upon the picturesque gable of the staircase, in the upper part of which is the clock and bell turret.

In the north-east corner we view, in the east elevation, the central and prominent feature, the back of the gate house.

On the ground floor, the entrance archway, which is about 7 feet 6 inches in width, has been modernized. Over it are two three-light windows of the late Gothic period.

The parapet is wholly in brick of the thin and ancient kind.

THE WEST FRONT.

The whole of the west elevation is now built of stone. The walls of the bottom storey (with the exception of the gate house) are 3 feet 6 inches in thickness. Those of the upper storey are, however, much thinner, that on the southerly side of the gate house being only 18 inches thick. It is probable that at one time this portion was built in timber and plaster.

In the lower and upper storey on this southerly side of the gate house are three small two-light Tudor windows.

On the northerly side of the gate house are three similar windows lighting the billiard room. Above is the withdrawing room, lighted on this side only by a three-light window in the middle of the western side of the room; but two other windows adjoining it have been built up.

THE EAST FRONT.

Again, alterations and rebuildings have been extensive, but the result is most picturesque and charming.

The combination of building materials is indeed most remarkable. Standing in front of this elevation, on the left we have the massive stone walling of the lofty kitchen, surmounted by a fine stack of red-brick chimneys, and we catch a glimpse of the side of the half-timbered gable terminating skyward the overhanging first storey portion of the south elevation.

Carrying the eye along the east elevation in a northerly direction, we observe a number of gables, and also much half-timbered work in picturesque confusion.

The quaint old doorway and bridge over the moat are worthy of observation.

The whole of this front is delightfully coloured with browns, yellows and greys, by moss and lichen growth, and the effects of time. Pretty little ferns and delicate creepers grow up from the moat on to the walls and bridge.

THE SOUTH FRONT.

The wall of the bottom storey is of stone, and from the very varying thicknesses in different rooms we have indications that this bottom wall may have been built at different periods, there is also a great want of uniformity in the windows that support this idea.

A single-light window in the servants' hall is of the Decorated period.

Over this bottom storey the rooms were corbelled out over the moat about 2 feet in half-timbered work, but this has since been cemented over, and does not harmonise with the rest of the building.

THE NORTH FRONT.

With the exception of the gable end of the withdrawing room and a short piece of wall adjoining, the whole of this storey is of half-timbered work, mainly in its original state. The central portion overhangs the moat about 3 feet.

The bottom storey is built entirely of stone.

On this side of the house the garden is very charming, for here are spacious lawns and magnificent old yew hedges with venerable cedars and firs.

The garden occupies much higher ground to the north and forms a wide terrace.

THE BRIDGES.

The principal is the one leading over the moat to the gate house, and is built of stone.

A second bridge, of ancient date, crosses the moat from the doorway leading from the back yard to the east of the great hall.

A third bridge crosses the moat on the north side of the house, giving access from the quadrangle to the bowling green. This is a wooden bridge.

THE OLD BARN.

This grand old building is situated at the back of the house on rising ground. Its interior somewhat resembles a church, for the barn is divided into what at first looks like a nave and aisles, by the five grand roof principals, leading features of which are the massive posts resembling the

columns of a nave arcade. The roof is strengthened with a number of struts and wind braces.

The stables formerly had accommodation for 300 horses.

OWNERS OF IGHTHAM MOTE.

This estate was in the possession of Ivo de Haut, and his descendant, Sir Henry de Haut, died possessed of it under Edward III. His son, Sir Edmund, died during the life of his father, so that his grandson, Nicholas, became his heir, and succeeded him in the possession of the estate. He left two sons, William, who was of Bishopsborne, and Richard, who succeeded him in this estate; but having engaged, as well as others of this county, with the Duke of Buckingham, in favour of the Earl of Richmond, he was beheaded at Pontefract, and his estates confiscated.

This manor was soon after granted by Richard III. to Robert Brakenbury, Lieutenant of the Tower, who only possessed the Mote for a short period, being slain, with King Richard, at the fatal battle of Bosworth.

On the Earl of Richmond attaining the crown, being attainted by an Act, although his two daughters were restored in blood, the Mote was immediately conferred on the heirs of its former owner, Richard Haut. The attainder of the latter being also reversed, in their descendants it remained till the latter end of the reign of Henry VII., when it appears, by an old court roll, to have been possessed by Sir Richard Clement, who dying without any legitimate issue, his brother, John Clement, and his sister, Agnes, became his coheirs; the former, however, succeeded to the entire fee of this estate.

John Clement died without male issue, having an only daughter and heir, Anne, who carried the Mote in marriage to Hugh Pakenham; and he, in the reign of Edward VI., joined with Sir William Sydney, who had married Anne, his only daughter, in the sale of this manor to Sir John Allen. He was of the Mercers' Company, and a man of the most extensive liberality, having presented to the City of London a rich collar of gold, to be worn by the succeeding Lord Mayors. He bore for his arms, *In three roundlets, as many talbots passant, on a chief, a lion passant, guardant between two anchors.*

He left a son and heir, Sir Christopher Allen, whose son

and heir, Charles Allen, Esq., succeeded his father in this estate, and resided at the Mote, which he afterwards sold, at the latter end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, to Sir William Selby, younger brother of Sir John Selby, of Braxton, in Northumberland. He resided here at the latter part of his life, and died, greatly advanced in years, in 1611, unmarried, bearing for his arms, *Barry of twelve pieces, or and azure*. He by his will gave this estate to his nephew, Sir William Selby, who resided here, and died without issue, having devised the Mote, for the sake of the name, to Mr. George Selby, of London, who resided here, and was sheriff in the reign of Charles I.; he bore for his arms, *Barry of eight pieces, or and sable*. He died in 1667, leaving several sons and daughters; of whom, William, the eldest, succeeded. He married Susan, daughter of Sir John Rainey, Bart., of Wrotham, by whom he had several children; John, the eldest, being of the Mote, who left two sons, William, who succeeded him in this seat and estate at Ightham, and John Selby, Esq., who was of Pennis, in Fawkham, and died unmarried.

William Selby resided at the Mote, of which he died possessed in 1773, leaving his wife surviving, who possessed this seat and resided here. She died in 1788, and her only son, William Selby, Esq., of Pennis, dying in 1777, as also his only daughter, Elizabeth Borough Selby, this seat, with her other estates in this county, devolved to John Brown, Esq., who afterwards assumed the name of Selby, and resided at the Mote.

His son, Thomas Selby, succeeded. He was born at Haverhill, co. Suffolk, 17th August, 1752, buried 18th March, 1820, the estate then devolved upon his wife, Elizabeth, who died March, 1845.

At her death the Mote passed to Mr. Prideaux John Selby, of Twizell, Northumberland, who was succeeded by his eldest daughter, Mrs. Luard Selby, who came into possession of the Mote in 1867 on the death of her father.

Ightham Mote is now the residence of Thomas Colyer Colyer-Fergusson, Esq., J.P.

The Village of Ightham is situated on the road from Dartford to Tonbridge, 1 mile south-west from Wrotham station on the Ashford section of the S.E. & C.R., 5 miles east from Sevenoaks, 12 miles west from Maidstone, and 27 miles from London.

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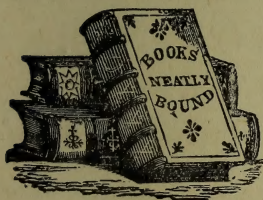
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